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THE BLIND AS INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

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Before I set forth our plans for the training of the blind, I want to say a few words about the social aspects of the blind question. There are many types of handicaps which result in economic and social troubles but I think I can aptly term the blind as the Ishmaelites of this century. They have been driven out of community life, out of industry, prevented from owning their own homes and maintaining them, and for decades they have cried out for a chance and the answer has always been "Charity." What could be more conducive to idleness, to melancholy and to despair than to know that your brother must be your keeper? I speak with some intimate knowledge of the blind when I say that they are swayed by the same emotions, stung by the same criticisms, elevated by the same praise, won by the same influence as are the seeing. Therefore, in our dealing with them and their handicaps we should be guided by the same standard that we set for the seeing. As it is now, when a man loses his sight he finds himself adrift in an unknown and uncharted sea and until of his own wit he can find his bearings he is lost. Now, this has not been the result of any intention on the part of society. It is simply one of our horrible social mistakes. Great Britain, France and Italy, at the very beginning of the war, horrified by the number of blind soldiers, began to take inventory of the possibilities of occupations for these soldiers and to start training centers where they could salvage such human wrecks. The results of these experiments—because experiments they were—have been most beneficial industrially for the blind. Now, our battle cry is exactly the same as that of our Allies—freedom for nations and liberty for individuals—and like them we are going to leave no stone unturned to see that the men who have given so much for us shall be given at least an opportunity for employment without the stigma of charity. The work of re-educating and rehabilitating the blind is probably one of the most difficult phases of the reconstruction problem that we have to face. In the

first place, the public has made up its mind that the blind except as peddlers of shoe strings and lead pencils are industrially useless. They forget all that long list of distinguished blind men—statesmen, musicians, poets and merchants; and the family, overwhelmed by its grief, misguided by its own sympathy, throws every obstacle in the way of opportunity; and the blind man himself misled by his friends and by the attitude of the world is easily persuaded to “fling away ambition.” These difficulties we are trying very hard to overcome, and we, like the blind man, need sympathy and charity less than we do active assistance and moral support.

A great many people ask me the question, “What can a blind man do?” Well, a blind man can perform any operation in which judgment based on sight is not necessary. In order concretely to translate this, the Surgeon General of the Army, in conjunction with the Surgeon General of the Navy, has established in Baltimore a training school for the blind. This training school is located on a magnificent estate tendered the government for the purpose by Mrs. T. Harrison Garrett of Baltimore. To this place are to be sent all the blinded soldiers, sailors and marines, also such men as are blinded while working in the government munition plants. To supplement this work Congress has authorized and empowered the Federal Board for Vocational Education to take the man when his training is completed in our hospital school, and carry it to completion and see that suitable jobs are provided. The Red Cross has organized, at the request of the Surgeon General of the Army, the Red Cross Institute for the Blind. This is to supply the necessary economic and social supervision for the blind men after their discharge by the various governmental departments.

In the preparation of courses to be taught the blind men, we first had to determine by experience and investigation what a blind man could do, and we found that he could do so many things that we began to classify them, and now when a man comes into our school we have several groups of things to offer him—professional, industrial, commercial, agricultural, blind-shop work, and home work—and just which group this man will fit into we only know after a thorough and complete study of the man. We go even further; not only do we study the man himself but the community in which he lives and his family. These are very essential considerations in the choice of any occupation. Then we have in the hos-

pitals a group of teachers culled from the best in this country. Our supervisor of education is, for instance, a man of years of experience in one of the largest institutions for the blind in this country.

Now, when it comes to industrial work we have not proceeded in a haphazard manner. We have not said too ourselves, "John Jones works in a cigar factory; therefore we will adopt that particular trade for our school." We have put on the road to make a scientific survey of industry for us a most competent industrial engineer. He is organizing a force of investigators. They will go into plants and study conditions. If a plant itself comes up to the standard which we have set, then he goes to work to analyze the jobs and to set aside in memoranda form any particular feature of any particular job that a blind man can do. Then the memoranda are sent to Baltimore to be studied by those who know the blind, to determine the feasibility, from the blind man's standpoint—of that job. If it is believed possible for a blind man to carry on such trades, the memoranda are sent back to our industrial engineer for elaboration. A complete motion study is then made of the particular operation selected as a basis for the school course of that trade. We believe that the failure on the part of many of the blind who have attempted to go into industry has been due to lack of training.

We must acknowledge at the start that the blind man is handicapped—that he is handicapped let us say 30 per cent. Then it behooves us to make up for that 30 per cent natural loss of efficiency by 30 per cent better training than that received by the seeing. Let us take typewriting. We are working now to devise a typewriter for the blind. Of course, a great many of my blind friends and those who teach the blind say that this is unnecessary, and that a blind man should be able to use any typewriter. I agree to that, but he should have one typewriter on which he can exceed in speed the sighted man, and that is what we are working for. If we succeed in getting it we will then make him an industrial, commercial asset. It is our idea to increase everywhere we can by skillful education the blind man's efficiency, and we feel that when we are able to do that, when we have devised courses and started work which will result in that, that we have at last found a way to assist the blind man into industry. Further, we have thought not only of the blind man but also of his employer. We do not intend to

have an employer discharge a single one of our blind men for inefficiency. Our industrial engineers will know when a blind man falls below the standard set by the plant and we are going to take him out and *thank* the employer for giving him a chance. We feel if we do that we will be making friends for the blind men. The incompetent will be taken back and re-educated for some other profitable position.

The manufacturers and the other business men have opened their hearts to us. They see our difficulties and are willing to help us. In fact, they have gone so far as to offer to open schools in various trades and take our men at their own expense and teach them trades—trades which will pay \$3.00, \$4.00 and \$5.00 a day—and stand all the necessary expense and worry and trouble in order to help us get the blind soldiers, sailors and marines back on the job. When we establish these things for the military blind, as Major Todd states, we have opened the way for the employment of the civilian blind as well.

Our military blind are young and as we get them started shortly after they are injured they are fine subjects for training. We realize that for the civilian blind of the past we can probably do little. We are looking in our dreams for the civilian blind to those of the future, to the hundreds of thousands for whom we should be prepared. Some scheme must be devised to get the man early, to give him the proper training and to keep him forever under proper supervision.

In our army, we have divided our services into that for France and that for the United States. Those two subdivisions have complete organizations. The work in France is under the Chief Consultant in Ophthalmology of the A. E. F. In this country there is an officer connected with the Surgeon General's office who supervises the work. The work begins abroad when a man gets back to the hospitals; there he is instructed in games, reading and writing. He must primarily be entertained with no serious attempt at any occupational study. He goes from the base to a special hospital center. There the Field Director, who is a member of the staff of the Chief Consultant in Ophthalmology, and who has charge of the active field work will have his headquarters. Here also are congregated the instructors. These instructors will teach not only literary subjects; they will show the blind men how to shave, walk with a cane and use a typewriter.

From the special hospital center, the blind men are sent to the port of embarkation to be transported across the ocean. Our teachers will instruct invalided men who are coming back with the blind, how to care for them on the return voyage. The high morale of the returning blind bears mute testimony to the splendid work of the Chief Consultant in Ophthalmology in the A. E. F.

When the blind reach the States, they go to the distributing hospital at the port of debarkation. They are there given a physical examination by special surgeons. If there appears to be a chance of saving some sight by surgical procedure, they are sent to a physical reconstruction center, devoted to eye surgery. There the man's eyes are again gone over, looking to the possibility of the restoration of vision. If it is deemed possible to do more, the attempt is made. If the attempt fails, the blind man is sent on to the blind-teaching center in Baltimore. The blind-teaching center is a military establishment under the command of a military officer. Besides the military personnel there is a civilian director of education, teachers, schools and shops. When the man completes what we have to offer, he will then be given practical instruction in shops, factories, etc. When he is through his practical training, he will be ready to be placed in the profession, trade, or whatever happens to be his future occupation. At first we will place him on trial employment, to see whether he can make good. If he cannot, we will withdraw him and re-train him for some other occupation.

In order to demonstrate the practicability of selected shop work, we are not only having our engineer devise courses, but are preparing to send out teams of blind civilians. These civilians will be untrained and they will go into factories with the full knowledge of employers that they are not what we call ideal workers but are to be used to demonstrate the practicability of the particular job at which they are set. If they can perform the work even moderately satisfactorily, we feel confident that our trained blind will be able to make of that job a definite success.

A complete "follow-up" system has been organized. The Civilian Relief of the Red Cross has divided the United States into districts—sixteen in all—from each one of which there is to be sent to our school in Baltimore one trained social service worker to be educated in our school side by side with the blind. In that way these workers become acquainted with the needs of the blind.

Each trained worker will build up in her district the necessary organization for taking care of the blind of her district. Of course, being skilled in handling the blind, these local directors will be of infinite help in seeing that the blind men live up to our expectations, and she will keep us posted as to the success or failure of our undertaking.

We believe that it is essential that the men be cheered up just as much as possible. When they come in they are met in a perfectly frank way. They are told a perfectly truthful story about their condition. We make no attempt to force them into work. We give them time to think over their future, and while they are thus occupied, we lead them along right paths. Simple things such as typewriting are started abroad and are continued, though serious work is not attempted at this stage. The teachers take advantage of this period to sound the man out as to his desires and ambitions.

In order to help the men, to stimulate them, the Red Cross Institute for the Blind has opened in Baltimore a house into which we invite one member of each blind man's family—either his mother, his sister or his wife. This relative is allowed to go to the school and see the men at work, so that she will understand the difficulties, and when the time comes for returning home, the family will be in a position to be of material service in the work which we have undertaken.

As an illustration of the practical character of the instruction to be given, let me describe our course in massage. The teacher in charge of this work is an instructor of massage in one of the important civilian hospitals. She will teach both theory and practice. But before she starts, the men will be given simple courses in anatomy and physiology by a competent physician. We have a wonderful opportunity to teach massage, because we have at our service all of the big reconstruction hospitals in the United States, in which the blind can actually work. It is our hope to turn out our masseurs so well-trained that they can be made the chiefs of this service in the reconstruction hospitals. Thus, they will get a chance to have under their direct charge from 2,000 to 3,000 patients.

We well understand that blind men will come back to this country men physically and mentally capable, also men who are

neither physically nor mentally capable, others who are physically but not mentally, and still others who are mentally but not physically capable. Therefore, we must prepare not only for trades, where the blind must enter into competition with his fellows, but for home work, where he can make as much as his mental or physical condition will permit. Some will have to be placed in organized shops for the blind, where certain opportunities, narrow though they be for the blind man, are open. The shops for the blind have in this country really proven a godsend to the blind because, cut off from the ordinary means of livelihood, the blind in the larger cities have been able to help in their support.